



MICHIGAN COURTS NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Families Celebrated at First Statewide Michigan Reunification Day

LANSING, MI, June 24, 2016 – The pathway from foster care back to a reunified family is not easy, and families who have been reunified were celebrated today at a Michigan Hall of Justice ceremony. Fifteen children, representing five families from Washtenaw County and three from Cass County, joined Justice Bridget M. McCormack and judges from around the state at the first statewide Family Reunification Day.

“Last year, I was honored to be invited by Judge Connors to join his team at the Washtenaw Trial Court for their first Family Reunification Day,” said Justice McCormack. “There were so many smiles from the kids and so many great stories of success from the families that we decided to have a statewide celebration. So here we are today – to do just that, and to inspire courts statewide to follow our lead in the years to come.”

In calendar year 2015, more than 8,000 children left foster care. Of those children, almost half were reunited with their families, a quarter were adopted, with the balance either aging out of foster care or entering adult foster care. Michigan’s Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) offers intensive services to help families address problems such as substance abuse. Locally, the Ingham County Circuit Court Intensive Neglect Services Program is designed to provide enhanced casework services to prevent the placement of children in foster care or permit an earlier return of the children who have been placed in foster care.

[Michigan Reunification Day](#), which is part of the [American Bar Association’s annual Reunification Month celebrations](#), recognizes the important accomplishments of parents, and the many professionals who support them, in having their children safely and successfully returned home from foster care. The goal of Michigan Reunification Day is to reunite children with families and recognize the vital role that community partners such as mental health and substance abuse professionals play in making it possible for families to stay together. Reunification Day is also intended to encourage courts to follow the lead of Washtenaw and Cass counties and hold similar events in communities across the state.

Participants in the ceremony included Washtenaw County Judge Timothy Connors, Cass County Judge Susan Dobrich, Ingham County Judge Laura Baird (Michigan Judges Association President), Cheboygan County Judge Robert Butts (Michigan Probate Judges Association President), Nottawaseppi Huron Band of the Potawatomi Judge Melissa Pope, and Homer Mandoka, former tribal council chair. Hunter Genia of the Saginaw, Swan Creek, Black River Bands of Chippewa and Grand River Ottawa opened the ceremony with a traditional drum song. The executive branch was represented by Stacie Bladen, DHHS Deputy Director of the Children’s Services Agency.

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